

Queensland Josephite Associate Conference

26th May 2018

Our Mission into the Future

“That the **lay faithful** may fulfil their **specific mission** by responding with **creativity** to the **challenges** that face the world **today**.”

Pope Francis May 2018

This statement, which was Pope Francis’ Prayer intention for the month of May, underpins my focus in this presentation.

Who are the **‘lay faithful’**?

*“By virtue of our baptism, all the members of the People of God have become **missionary disciples**. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization.”*

Vatican 11

Vatican 11 acknowledged our role as lay faithful within the Church. This impels us all as Josephite Associates, as lay faithful, to recognize this baptismal call and to act on it. It gives us the impetus to be people of action, that is, to be active missionary disciples in our world today.

What is **‘Mission’**?

Two definitions of the word ‘Mission’ include *“An important job that someone is sent somewhere to do”* and *“The vocation or calling of a religious organization, especially a Christian one, to go out into the world and spread its faith”*

From this we can see that each of us plays a part in God’s Mission. We as lay people are called to ‘go forth’, to enable others to hear and experience the Good News.

Creativity: the use of imagination or original ideas to create something

Challenges: something new and difficult that requires effort and determination

Through this prayer intention, we know that Pope Francis is praying for us and he is inviting us all to pray for each other so that together we may actively fulfil God’s mission through the sharing of the Good News. In this presentation today we will explore what this means for us as Josephite Associates.

Associates, Companions, Oblates...

Within the lay faithful across the world today there are many groups known as Associates or Companions or Third Orders or Oblates or other such titles, all of whom are connected to established religious communities. Sr Joan Chittester, a Benedictine from North America, asked the question at a recent gathering of ‘Oblates’ (the name given to associates of the Benedictine Sisters), *“Why do Oblates (Associates), exist?”*

Her response to this was: *“To give new life, wider space, new depth and stretch to the charisms of the religious communities whose task it was to converge those gifts into one great flame so the rest of the world can see it and so themselves envision another way to be alive.”*

What then is **Charism**?

- Charism is a gift or calling of the God’s Spirit, given to be shared with others for the building up of the reign of God
- Charisms are given to each of us for the sake of the whole Christian community ...and so they must be given away for the sake of the whole Christian community!
- A Charism is a living passion for whatever dimension of the life of Christ is needed now, here, in our time.
 - It can live in us only when we accept it.
 - It can live only when it is continually nurtured, energised, renewed and developed in us.
 - It can live in us only when we take responsibility to use it.
- In our Josephite Associate Handbook it states:
A charism is a continuing force which compels us to participate in the mission of Jesus by addressing contemporary issues.

We who are called to share in a charism recognize that each of us - lay people as well as religious - carries within us a piece of the truth — but only a piece. Together, Sisters and Associates, can bring this charism alive.

*Our **Josephite Associate Mission Statement** expresses this:*

As Josephite Associates we respond to the call to live the charism of Mary MacKillop in our daily lives in our own unique way. We support one another by friendship, prayer and service to make a difference in our local area and so further the reign of God.

Sharing of the Charism in other Religious Orders

All Charisms are at the service of the Mission of God to bring about the Reign of God. In light of this, let’s take a moment to reflect on some other ‘associate’ groups. Here I have outlined briefly three examples from their websites. I invite you to notice what is shared in common with us as Josephite Associates and what points of difference there may be.



Oblates

People who want to make a deeper commitment to God by following the Christian journey in the way it is marked out by St Benedict – that is, “with the Gospel for our guide”. The Rule of St Benedict is a gospel rule, and a rule which is Christ-centered.

Oblates are drawn to a particular Benedictine community and affiliated with a particular monastery. They commit themselves to serving Christ and living the monastic values in their own families, workplaces and circumstances in the world. (Monastic values include reverence, peace, patience, humility...)

After a period of discernment and formation (usually 12 months), they offer their lives to God in a formal ceremony of commitment which is witnessed by the community and their family and friends.



Mercy Associates are people who cherish the virtue and practice of mercy in their lives and seek a faith community to nurture their commitment to mercy.

They meet for prayer, formation and reflection, and to engage in service initiatives based on mercy and justice within and beyond their local community. Mercy Associates groups are found in a variety of places including parishes and larger networks. It is anticipated that new groups will form in future years, including in Mercy workplaces.



Franciscans Iowa

Franciscan Associates are women and men from all walks of life who share the values and spirit of St Francis. Together they embrace the charism of St Francis and St Clare as they live the Gospel in their daily lives.

Associates make a commitment to integrate the Franciscan charism while remaining in their own lifestyle. They bond with the Sisters of St Francis and each other in various ways: faith sharing, prayer, study, service and congregational celebrations.



Josephite Associates:

- **Why do we exist?**
- **Where do we come from?**
- **Who are we?**
- **What must we do? (Mission)**

1. Why do we exist? (What is our Purpose?)

Rephrasing Joan Chittester's definition, we exist *"To give new life, wider space, new depth and stretch to the charism of Mary MacKillop to create one great flame so the rest of Australia/world can see it and so themselves imagine another way to be alive."*

Walking with one another and with the Sisters, we each carry a part of the story as we all have a part to play in ensuring that Jesus' mission, shared through the lens of Mary's living, is alive in our world. Mary's words, "So great is the strength we possess in our unity" reminds us of the gift of being community, of belonging to something which we believe in and share.

2. Where do we come from? (Legitimacy)

- **Jesus' mission**
- **Peter, Paul and other disciples**
- **Mary and Julian**
- **Us**

Jesus Mission: The essence of how we live our lives is to continue Jesus' mission, to be the bearers of Good News. Let us take some time to reflect on Jesus' life and recall what he did, that is, in the ordinariness of his life what lessons did he give us? (Discussion)

Jesus showed us how to live as much of his time was doing 'the ordinary':

- For the bulk of his life he earned his living as a tradesman!
- He shared his story through partaking in so many meals!
- He asked for a cup of water (Samaritan Woman). This simple request and ensuing conversation led to many coming to follow
- He visited the sick: Peter's mother in law, Bethesda pool, official's son in Capernaum
- He encouraged people in their efforts to find meaning and purpose: Zacchaeus, Matthew, Mary and Martha ...
- He invited people 'into his story': to 'Come and see' ...Andrew, James and John Philip, Nathaniel, Matthew...
- He went aside on his own to pray, to spend time with God

All of this was done in the context of his daily life.

Peter, Paul and co: Pentecost, the feast which we have just celebrated, gave Peter and the other apostles, through the power of God's Spirit, the courage to go forward into the world, to 'make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.'

Paul then 'picked up the baton' and took Jesus' message further afield. I was fortunate in January to travel on a Biblical tour in the footsteps of Paul through Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Turkey. Through this and through the daily readings during the Easter season which focus greatly on Paul's writings I came to realise how hugely significant he was in bringing the good news to so many and in far flung places at that time. He is truly inspirational in his words and actions which still impact on us today. To those in Corinth his words pick up on our theme for today: *"To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ... To one is given wisdom, to another knowledge, to one faith, to another healing, to one power, to another prophecy. ... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit and given to each one as the Spirit determines for the sake of the body, the whole."*

We now move on 1900 years from Paul to **Mary and Julian**. The painting of the two of them



titled "The Vision" was painted by Jan Williamson for the sesquicentenary celebrations. It shows two young people with the shadowy image depicting the beginnings in Penola.

- What was Mary and Julian's Vision?
- What would they have talked about in Penola in 1865/66 that launched this vision?
- What were the challenges of that time to which they responded? (Discuss)

Josephite Associates:

As members of the Church, we are **all carriers** of the Spirit's dream to participate in the mission of Jesus. Pentecost, in a sense, 'launched' this through God's gift of the Spirit that enlightened and helped clarify the apostles' mission for them and for generations to come.

We are all a part of that Vision of Mary and Julian...living our lives through this Charism. In this way we are all carriers of this particular tradition of sharing the Good News.

Earlier I stated that charisms need to be rediscovered and re-expressed for them to be relevant to a time in history. We could say that Associate Movements are "new expressions" of charism. Back in 1866 the Mary and the Sisters of St Joseph were the expression of a new charism that certainly 'lit a flame' across much of Australia and New Zealand. Vatican 11 invited religious orders to re-connect to their founders' stories and reasons for establishing them. Then at their Chapter in 1983 the Josephites set out to explore how they might invite others more closely into their story, their charism. Today as Josephite Associates we have the capacity to be a different expression of Jesus' story, through the lens of Mary MacKillop, for today's world. (Later I will refer to the Plenary Council as a possible way for Associates to be involved.)

3. Who are We? (Identity)

To be an Associate is to be a carrier of the tradition, of the charism of Mary MacKillop.

- How did each one of us come to be here today?
- What is your connection to this Josephite story? (Share in groups)

To be here today, giving up a weekend, suggests that each of us are

- Faithful and faithfilled members of our Church...
- People of the Gospel
- Carriers of the Spirit's dream
- Carriers of the spirit of Mary MacKillop

Do we have a passion to continue carrying the Story?

To be a Josephite Associate means sharing in the charism of Mary.... a charism made visible by:

- Confident trust in God.... Eg "God will provide"
- Respect for the dignity of all ...eg supporting refugees
- Simplicity of lifestyle...
- Inclusive hospitality...
- Practical approach to service...
- Faith and courage to risk suffering and failure...
- Support for the poor and powerless...eg reduced school fees
- Adaptable and flexible...

Take time to reflect on how you live these characteristics or are aware of other Associates living these characteristics in their lives.

Josephite Associates are people of many countries and cultures. At present there are Associates in Australia and New Zealand, Peru, Timor Leste and Scotland. Within each of these places there are many different cultural groups who have a strong affinity with Mary and her story: we only need to sit in the chapel at Mount St to see people of so many different cultures who have great devotion to her and love to pray at her tomb.

How many present here today were born in another country?

How representative are we Josephite Associates of our communities today?

4. What must we do? (Mission and Meaning) What is our mission into the future?

Jesus had said to his followers, 'You are to be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.'

At his Ascension the disciples were understandably feeling lost. Two men standing near said, 'Why stand there gazing into the sky? You have work to do.'

Those words are part of our challenge today. We are the ones to be Christ's witnesses, we have the work to do, to continue God's mission.

How do we make a difference in our world today?

How do we be a part of renewing our Church?

Who are our neighbours? How do we reach out to our neighbour today?

'I have no hands but yours to comfort and heal my little ones.

I have no mouth but yours to speak to the poor and needy.

I have no feet but yours to travel and tell the Good News.

I have no eyes but yours to see the needs of my smallest disciple.

I have no ears but yours to listen to those who cry out to me in their agony.' (Teresa of Avila)

We are Christ's hands and mouth, his feet and eyes and ears. We are God's instruments through which God's mission becomes the mission of us as Lay people, as Josephite Associates.

God calls us to be open, just as Mary MacKillop was open to God working through her. As we look to the future we recognize that there are two possibilities:

1) The one we plan, shape, strategise, organize and expect...

2) ...and the One that meets us!

The One that meets us is *God's Future*...Mary was open to God's future.

This means that we need to be open to God's Spirit as we move forward, opening our minds and hearts, so that *"in our daily lives, in our own unique ways we can make a difference in our local area and so further the reign of God."* (Josephite Associate Mission Statement)

To illustrate this I will share some stories /slides of Peruvian and Timorese Associates

Perhaps we need to “**Be Bold**” in who we are and what we do as Associates to enable others to be aware of who we are and what a difference we can make!

Peru:

- Peruvian Associates held their first Congress (Conference) in October 2016. Part of this involved a procession through the streets of Lima: vehicles and banners colourfully declaring who they were!
- Cajabamba: No Sisters have lived or worked here; it is an Associate, Maria, from Lima who has taken the story to Cajabamba.
 - ***We as Associates need to recognize that we, together with the Sisters, hold the story and need to be the story tellers into the future***
- An Associate from Lima has utilized resources provided by Australia and New Zealand to support a pre-school in this community
- Rosa, an Associate who has walked with the Sisters since they first went to Peru, enlivened a small community in Pitumarca so that some young women from there have taken on the role of supporting young children’s education
 - ***Rosa holds the story and has become a new expression of it in her situation***
- Women in Motupe, an outer suburb of Lima, are supported in the making of handicrafts which then are sold in Australia and beyond (including at the Queensland Conference!) Through a grant from Mary MacKillop International some of these women have become empowered to teach other women these skills so that they, in turn, can provide some support for families.

Timor Leste

- Over 30 young people last October made a commitment to become Associates at a ceremony last October (A few renewed their commitment)
- One parish group of Associates worked together, involving the army and police, to build a simple house for an elderly lady...a great witness of Associates to the wider community. (See IJALT Newsletter for the story)

Each situation for Associates is going to be different. We are called to *make a difference in our own unique ways in our daily lives...to further the Reign of God.*

What are the **challenges for today** in each of these?

- Society
 - Parish
 - Workplace
 - Town/city
 - Australia
 - World
- What are the challenges for each of us?
 - What are the challenges for our Associate groups?
 - What are the challenges for us as an Associate Movement?

Our Mission for the Future



Our mission for the future as we live the charism of Mary MacKillop is to support one another through Prayer, Friendship and Service by being

- To be creative in looking at our situations and our world so that we might see through new eyes
- We belong to a Community of Associates. Know that both individually and together we can make a difference.
- “Be Bold”! That is, be prepared to step out...take a risk...!

One possibility for our immediate future is that we can be aware of the Plenary Council that will take place in 2020. In these coming two years we as Associates, as lay faithful, can ensure that we are involved in conversations and events wherever we are.

Plenary Council website:

We are blessed with great diversity in our Catholic Church in Australia – many perspectives, experiences and encounters of faith, walks of life and vision for Church. We are called to explore what it is that we are called to, how we are called to be the presence of Jesus in Australia for today, and for generations to come.

United by faith, we shall: “Listen to what the Spirit is saying.” Rev 2:7

What part can we as Josephite Associates play in this process?

Link to *The Plenary Council 2020 — Listening to God by listening to each other*

<https://youtu.be/exNXH2YcB8Y>

May we go forward in hope to transform our world living the charism and spirit of Mary MacKillop.

Mary Hemmings

Chairperson

International Josephite Associate Leadership Team

May 2018